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SUBJECT: ECOWAS: PROGRESS ON AGRICULTURAL HARMONIZATION

REF: 2006 ABUJA 3130

11. Summary: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) member states met on May 16-18 to discuss harmonization of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) regulations for ECOWAS non- West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). Participants agreed that the signed UEMOA regulation should be the basis for formulating the ECOWAS SPS regulation, and the remaining activities required for full ECOWAS SPS harmonization should be completed not later than six months after the end of May 2007. End Summary.

REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON SPS

12. The regional workshop on the harmonization of sanitary and phytosanitary regulations for ECOWAS non-UEMOA member countries was held at the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja Nigeria from May 16-18, 2007. The workshop was attended by the public and private sector of the member countries of Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and The Gambia. Other participating organizations included FAO, EC, African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), Conference des Ministres de l'Agriculture de l'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre (CMA-AOC), Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs Agricoles (ROPPA) and UEMOA.

OBJECTIVES

13. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Create a forum that enables ECOWAS to present the findings of the SPS Regional Synthesis Report to national SPS public officials and private-sector operators and to use the opportunities identified in the synthesis report to design the way forward for non-UEMOA SPS integration.
- Discuss the UEMOA SPS regulation and related documents as a basis for adoption within the framework of the WTO SPS agreement and guidelines of its sister organizations.
- Prepare a position paper on the UEMOA regulation showing areas of agreement and differences, to serve as an input for the ECOWAS SPS regulation.

14. In his remarks, Dr Daniel Eklu, Director for Agriculture and Rural Development at the ECOWAS Commission, noted the need to implement sanitary and phytosanitary measures at the national and regional levels, so that product quality and agricultural trade be improved. He commended the convergence process promoted by ECOWAS and UEMOA and indicated the way forward in the process by formulating an action plan jointly with UEMOA.

AGRICULTURAL PILLORS

¶5. In his welcome address, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources Ousseini Salifou informed participants that the agricultural policy of ECOWAS is anchored on three pillars; improvement of agricultural productivity; regional integration and increase in agricultural trade among member States; and improvement of competitiveness and access to international markets.

¶6. He emphasized that to improve access to international markets, agricultural exports must comply with SPS standards of WTO and Member States must adopt Common SPS measures through regional harmonization. Salifou encouraged participants to agree on a sound legislative framework for the SPS harmonization, focussing on the three primary sectors - food safety, animal health and phytosanitary control.

¶7. The Commissioner acknowledged that UEMOA had done considerable work and the regulatory agencies gathered at the workshop might expand the legislative framework to a broader perspective suitable for the entire region and find areas of convergence acceptable ECOWAS member states.

USAID SUPPORT

¶8. Kofi Humado, representing the West Africa USAID Trade Hub (WATH), reported that West Africa is home to abundant agricultural, livestock, fish and seafood products, and to a wide range of locally produced foodstuffs. However, the region had low compliance with international quality standards, as well as arbitrary and unscientific sanitary and phytosanitary measures, which prevented the region from maximizing its participation in intra-regional and international trade within the context of the World Trade

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Organisation's SPS Agreement.

¶9. In the last three years, WATH has been supporting ECOWAS to develop a regional policy for the harmonization of plant health, animal health and food safety standards across its member states. This is to make trade among ECOWAS member states easier, make sourcing from West Africa easier for buyers from other parts of the world.

FINAL AGREEMENTS

¶10. After the introductory comments and workshop sessions, the participants agreed the signed UEMOA regulation should be the basis for formulating the ECOWAS SPS regulation with the incorporation of the recommendations and amendments made at the workshop in accordance with international definitions and ECOWAS legal format. The remaining activities required for full ECOWAS SPS harmonization should be completed not later than six months after the end of May 2007. Within this time, the draft ECOWAS regulation should be prepared and circulated to member states for their comments. The six month time frame should be strictly observed by ECOWAS to meet the January 2008 Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) being negotiated with the European Union.

CAMPBELL